

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 21EDITOR & PUBLISHER
23 January 1982

Reagan defends policies to curb news disclosures

By George Brandon

Defending his efforts to crackdown on government officials leaking classified national security information, President Reagan refused to rule out the use of lie detectors to plumb the source of unauthorized leaks.

The President was asked during his seventh full-scale news conference January 19 whether he will use "all legal means, including lie detectors," to ferret out the source of leaks of classified information. In reply, Reagan refused to discuss specific measures he might authorize in probes of leaks, saying only that William Clark, his recently appointed national security adviser, "is drawing up some specifics of that kind."

Reagan said any such investigative approaches would be "within the law, and they'll have to be judged—what particular things are done—will be judged on the individual case. It will not interfere with our determination to have an open administration present information that properly belongs to the press," the President said. "But we must stop that leak which . . . several times has really endangered things that we were trying to accomplish . . . We will certainly protect the constitutional rights of our citizens."

In response to a follow-up question later, Reagan acknowledged that in "one agency of the government right now—a major agency—there are some people voluntarily taking (lie detector tests) because they themselves knew that they had association with and knowledge of a tremendous leak that occurred."

Presumably, Reagan was referring to the Pentagon, where Deputy Defense Secretary Frank C. Carlucci himself took a lie detector test after ordering others to submit to it. Carlucci and other members of the Defense Resource Board took the test in an investigation launched after the *Washington Post* reported details of a board meeting in which a researcher estimated Reagan's plan to beef up U.S. defense efforts might cost \$750 billion more than had been projected.

Aside from the steps he may authorize to enforce his January 12 directive on national security leaks, Reagan also addressed press concerns about a memorandum sent to senior administration officials January 6 by James A. Baker III, White House chief of staff.

The President was asked if the Baker memo directing administration officials to clear in advance television appearances and major print interviews with the

having a closed administration, or if . . . this directive might have a chilling effect on reporters' efforts to gather the news."

"No, I don't believe so," Reagan responded. "All we're doing is what every administration before us had done—and we hadn't been doing. It's simply the case, so that we all know what is going on . . ." Reagan said the Baker memo is aimed only at coordinating and clarifying the position the Administration takes on issues, not cutting off the flow of information to reporters.

"We've seen the situation when it would have been very . . . educational for the people, and advantageous for us, if two or three particular issues could have been brought before the public," the President said. "And because of not checking with each other we found three separate departments all going at once with statements . . ."

Though the Baker memo drew less initial attention from reporters than the publicly announced plan to crack down on national security leaks, it gave rise to fears among the Washington press corps that even routine contacts with agency officials would come under White House scrutiny. It also led to confusion among agency staff and even some public affairs officers, who were not sure how far the White House wanted to go in "coordinating" the scheduling of press contacts.

Following is the pertinent paragraph in the original Baker memo distributed to cabinet secretaries, agency heads and senior White House officials:

"Specifically, it is requested that whenever you, or anyone under your jurisdiction, receives an invitation for an interview on a Sunday talk show, morning network television, *Nightline*, *McNeil-Lehrer* or other major press appearance (including print interviews), that you consult with the White House prior to your acceptance."

The Baker language later was included in a directive addressed to the top staff and administrators of the Department of Agriculture by Assistant Agriculture Secretary John Ochs. In the Department of Commerce, Public Affairs Director Mary Nimmo attached the Baker memo to her own asking staff to pay closer attention to coordinating major press appearances. It also was disseminated to staff in other cabinet departments and some, but not all, federal agencies.

The White House memo led to confusion among agency public affairs officers, so much so that White House Com-

memo— . . . top government public information specialists the evening of January 18 to clarify the memo's intent.

According to Nimmo of Commerce, the confusion resulted from uncertainty over what constitutes a major press appearance and the timing of the Baker memo arriving almost simultaneously with the President's announcement of the directive on leaks of national security information.

There were reports of some department officials going beyond the terms of the Baker memo and requiring prior clearance of routine staff contacts with the press. Nimmo said that in the absence of clarification from the White House, "people wanted to err on the side of the overly complying."

In the meeting with government communicators, Gergen "gave a much clearer reading," Nimmo said. According to Nimmo, Gergen explained that policy of prior clearance of press contacts was not meant to apply to routine interviews with broadcast and print reporters, but rather only to the major television appearances listed and, for print reporters, "a Sperting breakfast or National Press Club appearance." Godfrey Sperting of the *Christian Science Monitor* for years has brought together Washington reporters and officials for informal discussions over breakfast.

"There was a question whether this applied to a (telephone) call from the *New York Times*," Nimmo said. "The answer now is no."

The effects of the administration's two-headed effort to tighten the reins on information management were not immediately obvious among the Washington press corps.

Jack Nelson, *Los Angeles Times* bureau chief, said he noticed a difference in contacts with his sources since the Baker memo went out. "Some people who had been returning your calls . . . they're not now," Nelson said.

Walter Mears, Washington bureau chief for Associated Press, said he has not heard of his reporting staff encountering new obstacles as a result of the Baker memo.

Quoting unnamed "White House sources" and "White House officials," Nelson reported in the *Los Angeles Times* that President Reagan originally had planned to bar all background and off-the-record briefings by administration officials. Nelson's sources also said the President wanted to bar all contacts with the media unless they were cleared with the White House in advance, not just "major" appearances.

The Times story said some White House officials who believed such a policy would be unenforceable and a political